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THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF GREAT BOOKS.

"PARADISE LOST."

By W. Osborne Brigstocke.

"Faithfulness shall be the girdle of His reins."—*Isaiah* xi. 5.

We are said to come into the world naked—meaning not only devoid of earthly possessions, but also of mental gifts. Of course there is in a child the undeveloped germ of much—but that hardly counts. The mind is probably at first nearly bare, but not so bare as the minds of the first men must have been, because there is a great deal of ready-made clothing awaiting *us:* all we have to do is to put it on.* That is what we are sent to school for, and there we go through, over again, the trying scenes which the nursery witnessed when the first uncomfy vests were struggled into. These mental "clothes" vary as much as the tangible ones: it is only with one article that we are concerned to-day, and we must satisfy ourselves with trying on only one specimen of it.

If a man's father has built a house to live in, that man may not be obliged to spend time in constructing his dwelling-place, for there is one ready made for him. In the same way writers of former times, wittingly or by chance, penned sentences which have not since required re-writing—each is in fact a *dernier mot.* No one will ever try to express in more beautiful language—

> "We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

And no one will ever improve Dante's lovely description: "The soul comes from the hand of God, as a little girl, weeping and laughing in its childish sport, a guileless soul which knows nothing, save that, moved by its joyful Creator, willingly it turns to that which gives it pleasure." And who could wish to modify the dictum of Cervantes that "the pen is the tongue of the soul"? To Germany we owe the expression which so exactly defines the spirit of evil: "Ich bin

* "For every man with his affects is born;
Not by might mastered, but by special grace."
Love's Labour Lost, I., i.

der Geist der stets verneint"; we wade through pages of philosophy and volumes of ethics, but we cannot get away from the fact that "there is no virtue like necessity"; and the despondent scribbler may find consolation ready made if he can think that his work is "caviare to the general." And, lastly, when we are puzzled by magazine articles or afternoon tea discussions, and begin to wonder what *are* the essential characteristics of a "gentleman," all we have to do is to go to our bookshelf and turn to Horace's "dernier mot"—none the worse for its antiquity—

> "Est animus tibi, sunt mores
> Et lingua, fidesque."

Taine, in his history of English literature, speaking of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, says, "Ce qu'il y a de plus beau dans ce paradis c'est l'enfer." That is undoubtedly shrewd and true. Of course Satan can hardly be called a "gentleman," and we ought not to want to sympathise with him in any way: but we do, because Milton so evidently did, just as Shakespeare did with his great criminal Richard III. Every man has a more or less profound contempt for anything that is mediocre: "to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering," is Milton's—Satan's—way of expressing it. But Satan is not alone in feeling so strongly about mediocrity. "So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth," occurs in Revelation (iii. 16). Or, again, the following lines which (I fancy) came from Machiavelli's pen:—

> "The night that Peter Soderini died
> He at the mouth of hell himself presented.
> 'What, you come into hell? poor ghost demented.
> Go to the babies' limbo!' Pluto cried."

And in this connection I once saw a line from some old ballad quoted:—

> "She's nae fit for heaven, an' she'll ruin a' hell."

But the fact that Milton's Satan is so far removed from mediocrity—that he is so strong and great (though in the cause of evil)—does not wholly account for our admiration and sympathy. We do not feel in the same way towards Richard III. The difference lies in this—Richard III. is presented to us "deformed, unfinished, sent before his time

into the world, scarce half made up, and that so lamely and unfashionable that dogs barked at him." Do we wonder at his being a villain? No: we merely wonder at his force, just as we might marvel at the astonishing craft of a Madame Humbert. How different is it when, instead of a deformity, we observe the—

> "Dread commander (who) proudly eminent
> Stood like a tower; his form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and the excess
> Of glory obscured; as when the sun, new risen,
> Looks through the horizontal misty air
> Shorn of his beams. . . . . Darken'd so, yet shone
> Above them all the arch-angel."

Such a vision is almost as attractive as that of the undarkened archangel who visited Adam in the garden. One cannot subdue a lurking feeling of regret that so much glory should have suffered eclipse; and this sense of regret springs into flame when one reads,—

> "But his face
> Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care
> Sat on his faded cheek; but under brows
> Of dauntless courage and considerate pride
> Waiting revenge."

And, like indolent people agreeably surprised in church to find that the preacher is going to be "interesting," we rouse ourselves to listen to further details about this fallen chief of many throned powers. What are we told of this great angel who—

> "In the happy realms of light
> Cloth'd with transcendent brightness did outshine
> Myriads though bright"?

Personal appearance is, of course, not a thing by which we should be unduly influenced.

> "Garde-toi, tant que tu vivras,
> De juger les gens sur la mine."

Too frequently, however, do we allow our opinions to be thereby biassed. It is difficult not to feel lenient towards sinning beauty. And Milton has given us a picture of a sinning angel most—one might almost say, dazzlingly beautiful. It is hard to realize the magnificent description of this "fallen god and heavenly essence—hell's matchless

chief." When he speaks cheering words to the spirits damned, it is

> "As when from mountain tops the dusky clouds
> Ascending, while the north wind sleeps, o'erspread
> Heav'n's cheerful face, the low'ring element
> Scowls o'er the darken'd landskip snow, or show'r;
> If chance the radiant sun with farewell sweet
> Extend his ev'ning beam, the fields revive,
> The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds
> Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings."

Then we see him in the heart of hell put on swift wings, back towards the gates to explore his solitary flight—

> "Sometimes
> He scours the right hand coast, sometimes the left,
> Now shaves with level wing the deep, then soars
> Up to the fiery concave tow'ring high,"

until he reaches the ninefold impenetrable hell-gates, where sit two shapes described in words that are too well known to require repeating. (Book II. 648-676.) Then when the ghastly dialogue is ended and the gates have opened with impetuous recoil and thunder harsh, Satan stands gazing into a darkness without order, more terrible than that which he has just traversed. The "wary fiend," we are told, "stood on the brink of hell and looked a while, pondering his voyage; for no narrow firth he had to cross"—

> "A wild abyss,
> The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave,
> Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire;
> But all these in their pregnant causes mix'd.
> . . . The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark
> Illimitable ocean, neither bond,
> Without dimension . . . where eldest night
> And chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold
> Eternal anarchy."

At last he spreads his wings for flight and rises in a surging smoke; then falls with fluttering pennons plumb down ten thousand fathom, till a tumultuous cloud instinct with fire and nitre hurries him upward to where is neither sea nor dry land, where half on foot, half flying, he struggles on with head, hands, wings or feet, until at length a universal hubbub of wild stunning sounds and voices reveals to him

> "The throne
> Of chaos and his dark pavilion spread
> Wide on the wasteful deep; with him enthroned
> Sat sable-vested Night, eldest of things,
> The consort of his reign."

From before this throne of darkness, discord, and confusion, Satan "springs upward like a pyramid of fire into the wild expanse," until at length—

"The sacred influence
Of light appears, and from the walls of heav'n
Shoots far into the bosom of dim night
A glimm'ring dawn."

What a journey! It is quite inconceivable, though we can understand it quite enough to sympathise with the strong feeling of relief that came to Satan when he could fly with less toil—"as a weather-beaten vessel holds gladly the port, though shrouds and tackle torn." And what burning tears must have gathered in his eyes—tears such as angels weep—when he beheld

"Far off th' empyreal heav'n . . .
With opal tow'rs and battlements adorned
Of living sapphire, once his native seat;
And fast by hanging in a golden chain
This pendent world, in bigness as a star
Of smallest magnitude close by the moon."

We cannot but admire the dauntless angel who could brave the trials of such a journey. But, perhaps, such an achievement is not all too wonderful for a spirit "all heart, all head, all eye, all ear, all intellect, all sense." Grant it. Yet it is plain enough that Satan is far beyond compare with all his angels whom he calls "ethereal virtues." When they hear his voice they quickly resume new courage and revive. Nor is it only the power of oratory that moves them, though Satan's speeches are exquisitely worded. Nothing could be more lovely than his address to the sun—though Milton does seem to imply that the high words "bear semblance of worth not substance." We are also told that "spirits damn'd do not lose all their virtues," which seems scant praise for one who "for the gen'ral safety despised his own," who was full of "immortal vigour," who was not content with Mammon's otiose conception of hard liberty, working ease out of pain through labour and endurance. Satan's idea was an unending strife, and his one concern—"how attempted best?" His noble frame of mind is fully disclosed by the words,—

"But I should ill become this throne, O Peers,
. . . . if aught proposed
And judged of public moment, in the shape
Of difficulty or danger, could deter
Me from attempting."

Finally he comes to heaven's wall, more like a brave crusader before the ramparts of Jerusalem than the dread enemy of man. There, underneath the stairs "mysteriously meant" a sea of jasper flowed—or of liquid pearl. The stairs were then let down, whether to dare

"The fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate
His sad exclusion from the doors of bliss . . . ."

No, no; though we feel that Satan's place is outside heaven, he does not deserve that: he has been found to be beautiful, noble-minded, dauntless, and an exquisite orator. He is a noble enemy: he should be treated as such. Milton clearly intends us to feel all this; and we smile at the grim irony of "Satan bowing low to Uriel—*as to superior spirits is wont in heav'n.*"

But the real truth is suddenly flashed on us and all our sympathy vanishes: we have found that Satan satisfies nearly all Horace's conditions—*animus, mores et lingua.* The way in which the missing *fides* is brought home to us may be compared to a fact in school-boy life. A boy does not always realize his wrong when whipped, but some little word of reproach may subsequently reveal to him what his master feels. I remember being caned one day: of course I minded, but I did not really feel abashed until the following afternoon. My master was going into his garden to brush the green-fly off his rose trees. He asked for boys to help him. I volunteered. "I never care to have a boy to help me when I have had to whip him." That was a blow more cruel than any caning. Satan, I feel sure, experienced the same thing when

"Abash'd the devil stood
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Virtue in her shape how lovely."

And yet even after this, Milton seems unable to avoid feeling that he *might* sympathise with Satan—if Satan were not so very improper a character. When Satan sees the earthly paradise he exclaims,—

"O hell! what do mine eyes with grief behold!
Creatures . . . . to heav'nly spirits bright
Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue
With wonder, and could love. . . . .
And should I at your harmless innocence
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just,
Honour and empire . . . . compels me now
To do what else, though damn'd, I should abhor."

To call this "necessity—the tyrant's plea"—is unkind, for Milton may very well be accused of being as weak with regard to the lovely Arch-fiend. He succeeds in making us feel that Satan deserves utmost punishment. He lays emphasis on the lack of faithfulness, as if that were the great sin.

"So spake the seraph Abdiel, *faithful* found
Among the *faithless*, *faithful* only he
Among innumerable *false*, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His *loyalty* he kept, his love, his zeal."

But he allows us to feel that touch of pity which is one of the properties of tragedy. There is real tragedy in the torments under which Satan inwardly groans whilst the fallen angels adore him on the throne of hell; or in the hideousness of his having to "mix with bestial slime—essence to incarnate and imbrute that to the height of deity aspired." And, lastly, how sadly true is the picture of Satan in the mist: he was indeed "in the mist" in the presence of the God to whom he had been false. *Sadly* true, is it? Yes, I think we may say so; for even Milton will not let his Satan be quite baffled: only his deeds are to perish.

"He, who comes thy Saviour, shall recure,
Not by destroying Satan, but his works
In thee and in thy seed."

The educational value of this aspect of the poem? Surely that is plain enough. Ambition may be said to be "the last infirmity of noble minds"—"by that sin fell the angels." Milton has shown us a wonderful angel, still almost perfect though fallen, higher than man, worthy to be a model to us, were it not for one fatal flaw—faithlessness. The greatest angel in heaven was tempted, and fell—by ambition, yes; but if he had been faithful, ambition could not have got possession of his will. If such a being could be faithless in the very presence of God, can it be easy for us to be faithful, though we are still in the paradise God made for man to live in? Not easy. But for that very reason the surest rock on which our hands must build. Faithful to two things: faithful to the highest beyond us, faithful to the highest within us.

"They love truth best who to themselves are true,
And what they dare to dream of, dare to do!"

Satan dared to do what he dared to dream of: he was, in a way, true to himself—at least he thought so, until "he felt how awful goodness is."

THE HOME SCHOOLROOM.

By Christine Sharr.

Education! what is it? What does it convey to our minds as we slowly repeat the word syllable by syllable: Ed-u-ca-tion? It conveys a thought too overwhelming for words; years of our life swiftly flash across our mental vision and we sigh at the apparent impossibility of ever attaining the ideal we started out to seek.

Can we explain all it means? Can we say that our education is limited to any one period of our life? Were it possible, it would be difficult to select the time. The questions would arise one after another as to when our education commenced and when it ceased?

Froebel asks, "Do you know when, where and how your child's intellectual development begins? Where and when is the boundary of existence that has not begun, and of its actual beginning, and how this boundary manifests itself?" Surely those of us who have been brought into close communion with child life, will admit that the answer to these questions is not to be found during those years which are spent within the bounds of nursery and school. Our own experience brings us to the only reasonable conclusion, that while life and reason are our common portion, so surely do we continue to harvest, glean, winnow and thrash out the facts that encompass us on all sides; separating those things which are neither of use or value to us, from those which we can usefully employ; and which go to augment our stores of knowledge—in fine to broaden our education.

This is a thought full of serious import, over which we may well ponder at length. For the time being, however, let us glance shortly at the second period of a child's existence. He has passed from babyhood into childhood, free and happy; and for a while things continue to remain as before; the child is content to play his little games repeatedly, finding each time a new delight in them.